## UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT EASTERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK

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CV-94-1427

PATRICIA GERESSY, et al., : (JBW)

Plaintiffs, : United States Courthouse

-against-

Brooklyn, New York

DIGITAL EQUIPMENT CO., December 18, 1997

Defendant. : 2:30 o'clock p.m.

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS BEFORE THE HONORABLE JACK B. WEINSTEIN UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE

## APPEARANCES:

For the Plaintiff:

LEVY PHILLIPS & KONIGSBERG

520 Madison Avenue

New York, New York 10022 BY: STEVEN PHILLIPS, ESQ.

STEPHENIE LANNIGAN BROSS, ESQ.

- and -

LIPSITZ GREEN SAHRINGER ROLL SALISBURY & CAMBRIA

42 Delaware Avenue

Buffalo, New York 14202

BY: RICHARD SOLOMON, ESQ.

For the Defendant:

BROBECK PHLEGER & HARRISON LLP

1633 Broadway 47th Floor New York, New York 10019 BY: KENNETH J. KING, ESQ. CHARNA L. GERSTENHABER, ESO.

Court Reporter: Certified Realtime Reporter

Diana Pereira, RPR-CSR 225 Cadman Plaza East Brooklyn, New York

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THE COURT: Those scheduled now by Judge Hurley for

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     trial constitute all the pending cases in the court?
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              MS. BROSS:
                           Against Digital alone.
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              MR. PHILLIPS:
                              That is not correct.
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              MR. KING:
                          That is not correct.
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              MR. PHILLIPS:
                              There are other cases in which
     Digital is a co-defendant. As I understood the logic of
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     things, these represent cases in which Digital is the only
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     defendant, and therefore you don't have the complications.
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              THE COURT: I don't want any complications. How many
    co-defendant cases are there?
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              MR. PHILLIPS:
                              I don't know the answer to that off
    the top of my head. Perhaps defendant's counsel would have a
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13
    better handle.
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                         I think four, maybe five. I could get
             MR. KING:
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    you that information.
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             THE COURT: Okay. What is there pending in the
    Southern District against Digital alone?
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             MR. KING:
                         One is a Statute of Limitations motion
    pending. It is clearly dismissable under the new Statute of
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    Limitations rule.
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             THE COURT:
                        Who is that before?
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                         Judge Mukasey now. That sits with motion
             MR. KING:
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    pending. I think there is one live case.
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             MR. PHILLIPS:
                             That sounds correct. I haven't
   checked that, but that sounds correct.
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There are two others where a Statute of MR. KING: Limitations motion has already been granted. Because they are codefendants, the case moves forward, but not against Digital, because Digital has already been dismissed. May I also say that your Honor's order -- this is a preliminary matter, your Honor's order to show cause --THE COURT: I want to get the facts, if I may, and then I will, of course, I will hear you and hear anything you or anybody else wishes to say. What is pending in the State against Digital? MR. KING: If you want exact numbers, I would have to get them for you. It is around -- the reason I hesitate, your Honor, because the new Statute of Limitations rule affects the numbers. THE COURT: Of course. MR. KING: I can't give you exact numbers. THE COURT: Roughly. If you are saying, after all is said and MR. KING: done, based on only the pleadings, whether the Statute of Limitations rule will play or not, my estimate is that will leave in -- and discovery might prove that more of those are dismissable under Blanco -- ten cases. MR. PHILLIPS: I have the impression that there are rather more than that. Again, I haven't done the nose count. THE COURT: Okay. I think this court is ready to

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MR. PHILLIPS: What is their situation?

records, do a physical and be ready to go?

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haven't received a summons. Describe the case, please.

MR. PHILLIPS: I have a copy of the complaint which I think I have already sent to defendant's counsel, so that they have it.

The two ladies in question, one worked as a data entry worker at a medical laboratory, and the other, also, at New York Hospital, was a medical secretary, which makes the work akin, as you will recall, to what Mrs. Rotolo did. They both have had carpal tunnel surgeries recently. The medical records are all fresh. Both worked on the LK-201 in one instance and 401 in the other. Your Honor will recall those are reasonably fungible keyboards. There was testimony about that. It is subject of ample discovery. They are really plain vanilla cases.

These are two ladies whose cases we knew would, if Blanco had been affirmed, your Honor, these cases would have been time barred because they started using the keyboards more than three years ago. Under any other view of life, they were going to be timely. Once the Court of Appeals ruled, we put them into suit because they are seriously injured individuals. We do not have a stockpile of these, if your Honor is concerned about --

THE COURT: I want to clear the decks here. It is not my purpose to have a lot of cases piled in.

MR. PHILLIPS: I appreciate that. That is not our

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purpose. We had undertaken to represent these two individuals, had explained the reality of the Statute of Limitations. When the decision came in a form that plainly made them timely, we filed the cases.

THE COURT: Okay. I cut you off.

MR. KING: Just a preliminary matter. Your Honor's order to show cause states that you want before you cases not already set for trial before Judge Hurley. That's what your Honor said.

THE COURT: That's right. Whatever he is trying, let him try. Whatever is left, I would like to be tried and disposed of by motion or trial.

MR. KING: One of those cases is the Gonzalez case which has already been set for trial.

THE COURT: By whom?

MR. KING: Judge Hurley. It was apparently transferred in error. That shouldn't be part -- we all have that same order. In fact, your Honor has it in the stack right before you. We have attached to our papers in fact Exhibit B --

THE COURT: Why don't you take-- if he has a clerk assigned to this, take it up to that clerk. Either modify the order or -- My clerk is mentioning Judge Caden accomplished this deliberately because Judge Hurley consents.

MR. KING: I don't know that. I know what your

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     Honor's order says, and I know this one has already been set
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     for trial.
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              THE COURT: For when?
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              MR. KING:
                          April.
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                          Is it prior to my order or after?
              THE COURT:
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              MS. GERSTENHABER: November 18.
              THE COURT: Mine is the subsequent one. My order
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     applies.
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              MR. KING:
                          Is this part of what you want before you,
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     or not?
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              THE COURT: Yes.
                                 I will have it before me.
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                         The Gonzalez case, which corresponds to
              MR. KING:
    the order I just showed you, was in 1993. Magistrate Caden
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    set down certain cases as discovery ready. Gonzalez was one
14
    of them. We took the deposition in Gonzalez. The balance of
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    the cases before you today have never been set down as
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    discovery ready. In fact, today we got authorization from
    plaintiffs' counsel, just today, for the balance of the
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    cases. Plainly, we need to see those medical records.
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             THE COURT: Absolutely.
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             MR. KING:
                         And need time to conduct discovery, fair
    discovery, before we know what the entire lay of the land
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    looks like for these case.
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             THE COURT: Absolutely.
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             Give them all of the authorizations and all the
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     records you have in hand.
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              MR. PHILLIPS: We have already provided the document
     depository with the authorizations. We will give you another
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     set, if you wish.
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  5
              MR. KING:
                          The letter we got today was transmitting
     those authorizations just today.
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  7
                              They've had them for a while, I
              MR. PHILLIPS:
    think. We will give you another set tomorrow, whatever you
  8
    wish.
10
              THE COURT: Give them authorizations and open
    everything up. I don't want a Geressy thing again. If I have
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    a Geressy thing again, not I, but the court, will be very
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    upset.
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                             Your Honor, we will provide, as we
             MR. PHILLIPS:
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    did in Geressy --
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             THE COURT: Okay. I don't want it repeated.
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             MR. KING:
                         It is my understanding that, for example,
    the Geressy case, the punitive damage claim is out as to her.
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             THE COURT: Correct. As far as I am concerned, it
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    is.
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             MR. KING:
                         In fact, your Honor issued an order
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    stating that.
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             THE COURT:
                        I am not going to grant punitives in any
24
    of these cases.
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             MR. KING:
                         The second point --
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1 MR. PHILLIPS: I wanted to address that for a 2 moment. 3 MR. KING: Can I finish my point? 4 MR. PHILLIPS: I'm sorry. 5 MR. KING: With respect to Geressy, and then I will let plaintiffs' counsel speak, but I do have other things to 6 7 say as well. 8 In Geressy, that jury found that there was no design defect as to the LK-201. What you have before you today are 9 cases with two keyboard models, one of which is the LK-201, 10 11 one of which is LK-401. 12 Now, we believe that Ms. Geressy is not entitled to retry the design defect claim as to the LK-201, which is the 13 14 only keyboard that she used. 15 THE COURT: I will hear from the other side. 16 MR. PHILLIPS: Your Honor's order granting a new trial in Geressy granted it on all issues, because otherwise, 17 by logic, the liability finding should have stood because 18 19 nothing --20 THE COURT: Yes, I do. I did grant it. If there is any question, clarify it. It is a de novo case. All of these 21 are. Geressy will be de novo. I am not going to, based on 22 what I know about these cases, having tried them, I am not 23 going to grant any punitive damages. 24 25 MR. PHILLIPS: The only thing that I would ask, your

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11 Honor, and I know you will grant, is that at the conclusion of 1 the evidence, permit me to make my arguments. 2 3 THE COURT: Yes, you will. 4 MR. PHILLIPS: And endeavor to persuade you, not only of the wisdom of it, but of the same wisdom as existed 5 last time, which is putting it to a jury so that even if your 6 judgment was contrary to the Circuit's, it would be 7 preserved. I think we will cross that bridge --9 THE COURT: It is always open to new evidence and to 10 new consideration. 11 Okay. 12 Now, the question is when we put these on. All of these cases together will take how long for the plaintiffs' 13 14 case? 15 MR. KING: May I be heard also before we schedule 16 anything? 17 I want to make sure the record is clear what Digital feels about what you've stated is a procedure where these 18 cases will be tried together but not consolidated. 19 20 THE COURT: Correct. 21

MR. KING: I am not exactly sure of the distinction your Honor is drawing. I feel that, in essence, what we are looking at is a consolidated procedure of some form where all cases will be tried together for all purposes except for punitive damages, as your Honor just stated.

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We believe, your Honor, that the plaintiff has the burden here to show that there are common questions of fact.

I have read their affidavit.

THE COURT: There can't be any doubt about it, having tried it. There is a basic question of liability here.

MR. KING: Let me see if I can persuade your Honor. What they have shown here is that some plaintiffs used LK-201, some plaintiffs used the LK-401, and these plaintiffs claim an array of upper extremities ranging from pinched nerves in the neck to finger conditions all the way up and down the upper extremity.

It is not our burden to show differences. I don't think that saying that they used the keyboard and they claim these injuries is enough similarity here to warrant the procedure your Honor envisions. I know you've tried a number of these cases. We've been before you on three of those.

What I think the court has seen, and certainly saw in the case that we were part of, is that these cases are extremely fact specific, that even if you believe what their experts say causes these things, that there are numerous facts besides the keyboard, besides just typing, whether it be the height of the chair, the desk, how you hold your hands, although no one can define what angle your wrists should be while typing.

We are looking at here, before the court today, at

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plaintiffs' with different work sites, because these are cases about work and the work environment, different injuries. Some of the plaintiffs here on the Lipsitz Green side of it claim in their complaints cumulative trauma injury. We don't know what those are.

THE COURT: What does "cumulative trauma" mean?

MR. KING: I don't know. That is what is in the complaints. I don't think that's enough.

THE COURT: They will explain what they mean.

MR. KING: Different alternative causes, different dates of injury, which will require or necessitate different dates of notice, different documents, coming in for different purposes.

THE COURT: If I try these together, I will save several hundred hours of duplicative expert testimony. We do not have time in this court to repeat over and over again this expert testimony.

MR. KING: That is my next point, your Honor, because I want to address what you just said.

THE COURT: The expert testimony, apart from the medicals and so on with respect to the individuals, overlaps to the point that there isn't any doubt in my mind, having seen these cases and gone through them, that it will save at least several hundred hours. I consider it will save no less than one to two months of trial time.

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These cases have to be disposed of.

MR. KING: Your Honor, you bring me to my next point that I was going to make. This is the larger point here. I have heard from you, I have heard from you in chambers, we have all heard that you just don't want, don't feel it necessary, and as you just say now, you don't envision the same material being tried over and over again.

I understand your concern. Digital understands your concern. We believe, and I just want to make sure our position is clear, that these cases are more properly venued in a Workers' Compensation setting, not a products liability setting, if we look at what has happened in New Jersey.

THE COURT: Of course.

MR. KING: I think your Honor has some inkling.

THE COURT: Of course they should be in Workers'
Compensation. I don't have any doubt about it. The reason I
had originally set all these cases together was that I hoped
that between OSHA and Workers' Compensation and the various
manufacturers, a proper protocol would be worked out to
prevent more cases coming in, and these cases would be
disposed of by a proper allocation of liability, in essence to
what I consider OSHA's failure, if it existed, the defendant's
failure, and the failure of the employer as embodied and
protected, of course, by Workers' Compensation. I can't do
that now.

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1 These cases have all been separated. These cases would have been settled three years ago or whenever the Second 2 Circuit came down and required us to unravel them all. result of all of this has been, as you know, an enormous increase in transactional costs. Your firm and you are 5 wonderful lawyers. I thoroughly enjoy having you before me. 6 Your firm has probably made millions of dollars in fees. 7 plaintiffs have expended an enormous fund. They are going to want to get a whole third or whatever instead of getting a more reasonable settlement fee. We can't continue to have these drag on. women, if they are injured, are entitled to get compensation. They should get it in Workers' MR. KING: Compensation --THE COURT: I can't do that. I don't make the law. MR. KING: -- not in the products liabilities setting. THE COURT: I don't make the law. You have a governor here now, Governor Pataki, who agrees with you. has attempted to modify, in a variety of ways, the Workers' Compensation law to prevent these runarounds to the manufacturer of the instruments. That hasn't been accomplished. If you want to, call Albany, go to Washington, straighten it out. I am happy to see that happen, because I agree with you.

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1 I recognize that, your Honor. You say MR. KING: you don't make the law. Look at what is happening in the 2 State of New Jersey for our keyboard product liability cases. I know your Honor is aware of that, because your Honor cited 4 the Reiff opinion in your Honor's -- in the Geressy opinion. In New Jersey you have the Reiff case and two recent 6 trial court decisions which were affirmed by the Third Circuit 7 saying that as a matter of law there is no duty to have a 8 warning on the keyboard. As Judge Irenas said in Reiff, it is 9 like putting a warning on a snow shovel. 10 It doesn't make 11 sense. 12 THE COURT: Right. 13 The Third Circuit affirmed two recent MR. KING: cases dismissing these cases. 14 That's the Court of Appeals of the THE COURT: federal system, I suppose, interpreting what the state law is. MR. KING: Yes. THE COURT: Interpreting New Jersey law. They may be right or wrong; I don't know whether they are. I don't know enough about New Jersey law. I hardly know anything about New

York law. As far as New York law is concerned, the cases remain.

Now what is happening with the appeal to the Second Circuit?

> MR. KING: That is my next point.

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1 THE COURT: Has it been set for argument? 2 MR. KING: No earlier than February 2nd. February 3 2, your Honor. We do have a decision in the Western District of New 4 York which dismissed the case against Digital on the same 5 grounds that the Circuit affirmed in the two New Jersey 6 7 cases. My point is --8 There is no court I admire more than the THE COURT: Western District of New York --9 10 MR. KING: I understand, your Honor. 11 THE COURT: -- except for the Second Circuit and New York Court of Appeals and the Supreme Court of the United 12 13 States. 14 MR. KING: I understand, your Honor. I will address the Second Circuit point in a second. 15 16 Just to finish the thought. The answer here is, your Honor is dismissing the cases. 17 18 THE COURT: I am not going to dismiss them. 19 want to make a motion, make it. 20 I look forward to making that motion. MR. KING: 21 THE COURT: I look forward to receiving it. But I don't have a motion before me. I have a series of cases 22 before me, which, except for the one that was just slipped 23 into court, and I don't use the word "slipped" in any 24 denigrating or derogatory sense, just a time problem. 25 I have

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cases that should be ready for disposition. They are old
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     cases.
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              Now, how long will these take to try?
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              MR. PHILLIPS:
                              Your Honor, the last group took a
     shade over three weeks. Your Honor had a truncated schedule.
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              THE COURT: How long will they take to try?
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              MR. PHILLIPS:
                              Three full weeks, in my view.
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              THE COURT:
                          That's not right. Five weeks.
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     give them five weeks.
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              When do I have five weeks; April?
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              MR. KING:
                          We need a lot of discovery here.
              THE COURT: You are going to get everything.
12
13
              THE CLERK:
                         April 20.
14
              THE COURT: April 20th for trial. Refer to the
    magistrate judge for expedited discovery. I don't want the
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    plaintiffs to drag their heels. If they do drag their heels I
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    am going to dismiss the case, I am telling you right now, for
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    failure to prosecute.
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             It is time to fish or cut bait on these cases, if you
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    will permit such a crude term, but you have to bear in mind I
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    come from an island where we dig clams and go fishing for our
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22
    livelihood.
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             MR. KING:
                         I would be remiss in saying, your
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    Honor --
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                        During the course of these proceedings,
             THE COURT:
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if it comes to the attention of the defendant or the
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   plaintiffs or the magistrate Judge that some of these cases
   ought to be separated for one reason or another, we will
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  reconsider this whole thing. I want these cases disposed of.
5
   It is time to clean them up.
                       Your Honor, you had asked about the
           MR. KING:
  Second Circuit appeal. I wanted to finish the thought because
  I think it is important that the court know, and then I have
  one other point I want to make, and that should be it.
           The argument is scheduled for no earlier than
  February 2nd. That's what the scheduling order is.
           THE COURT: Tell the Court, when you argue it, what I
  have done and tell the Court that if they are going to order
  them dismissed, I would like to know it.
                       I want you to know, your Honor, just so
           MR. KING:
  you know what is in that appeal, because at least in our
  office we are --
           THE COURT: That's from my judgment, right?
           MR. KING:
                            At least in our office we were very
                       Yes.
 surprised that the Second Circuit didn't take the question one
 that you had certified in the Geressy --
          THE COURT:
                      Yes.
                            I wasn't surprised but I was
 disappointed.
          MR. KING:
                            We, frankly, were surprised and a
                      Yes.
 little disappointed as well. However, that issue will be
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squarely before the Court in the Rotolo appeal as well as another evidentiary point that we made as well on the showing of another company's videotape.

THE COURT: That's right. Yes.

MR. KING: Certainly we would like that appeal guidance from the Second Circuit as to what the contours of this case should be, if it indeed should exist at all.

THE COURT: You can bring it to their attention. Why don't you order a copy of the transcript of the argument. Sometimes they give you a preview.

MR. KING: We will be there.

THE COURT: They take a recording which you can order, don't they?

MR. PHILLIPS: Yes. I think we --

MR. KING: And supply the court with it.

THE COURT: I am suggesting if you can get some indication, I will be happy to hear it.

MR. KING: To the extent the question and answer at the argument can give the Court any indication, we will be happy to supply it. I want to, you know, know those issues are before the court. We may very well end up, if we don't have guidance, we may very well end up seeing evidence that in the Rotolo appeal the court will rule the jury should never have seen.

THE COURT: I will look at February 2nd, whatever.

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If February, March -- we have April 20th.
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              They could decide this case a hundred times over.
     What else have they got to do?
  3
  4
              MR. KING:
                          I understand. I wanted your Honor to
     know the schedule.
  5
  6
              The final is, if what ends up is a case where all
    cases are tried together for all purposes, I do not think,
  7
    Digital does not think that is a fair procedure.
  8
                                                       I have a
    great trust and faith in the jury system. That becomes so
  9
    complicated and so cumbersome given all the differences we
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11
    know exist in this case.
              THE COURT: I don't believe that was the experience
12
    here. If it should turn out that that is it, I will
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14
    reconsider this whole problem.
15
             MR KING:
                         Thank you, your Honor.
16
             May I just have a second.
17
             We did move for a stay of any trial pending any
    decision of the Second Circuit.
18
19
             THE COURT: Denied.
20
             MR. KING:
                         I have addressed that.
21
            THE COURT: You want an order. Submit it, and I will
    sign it so you will have the document. Try to agree with the
22
23
    plaintiffs' counsel.
24
             MR. KING:
                         We are anticipating we would like to
   make, and I alluded to this earlier, motion stopping plaintiff
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Geressy on the design defect claim.
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  2
                          Okay. Make it. You will have to brief
               THE COURT:
          I am not prepared to do that at this moment.
  3
  4
              MR. KING:
                           I understand.
                                          I understand.
  5
              Thank you, your Honor.
  6
              MR. PHILLIPS:
                              Your Honor, the only observation I
  7
     would make is that I would hope that -- I am sure that the
     magistrate will address this -- that we arrive at a sensible
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     approach to getting this discovery done in an expedited way.
  9
     A concern that we've had, generally, and I am not pointing a
 10
     finger, at all, at Mr. King, but it is a concern that
 11
     oftentimes the defendants make their depositions of the
 12
    plaintiffs go day after day after day.
13
14
              MR. KING:
                          I have never done that. Never done that.
15
              THE COURT: I am sure they don't do that.
16
             MR. KING:
                          We haven't had a deposition go two days
17
    max.
          That's it.
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             THE COURT: You have a fine magistrate judge.
    Fortunately, we have excellent plaintiffs' counsel and defense
19
    counsel. I don't look forward to any non-professional
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21
    activities.
22
             MR. KING:
                         Thank you, your Honor.
23
                             Other than that, I have nothing
             MR. PHILLIPS:
24
    further.
25
             MR. SOLOMON:
                            Nothing further.
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                           I do have one thing. Do we have a date
              MR. KING:
     by which we have to file dispositive motions?
  2
  3
              THE COURT:
                          I haven't given you any.
  4
                          Does your Honor want to set one now?
              MR. KING:
     am sure we will be before the court in between now and then
  5
  6
     sometime.
  7
              THE COURT:
                          I have no reason to do so.
  8
              MR. KING:
                          Thank you, your Honor.
  9
              THE COURT:
                          You know what the target date is.
              Do you want the jury selected by the court rather
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    than the magistrate Judge? I prefer the magistrate judge,
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12
    because I can go on doing other things.
13
              Think about it, discuss it with your clients.
14
             MR. KING:
                          I will think about it.
15
             THE COURT: Let us know.
16
             Did we have a written questionnaire last time?
17
             MR. KING:
                         We did.
                                   I will think about that as well.
18
             THE COURT: Think about how big a panel you want.
    don't want too big a panel. On the other hand, I don't want a
19
    panel that doesn't give you an appropriate number of jurors to
20
21
    challenge.
22
             MR. KING:
                         We will work all that out.
23
             THE COURT:
                         Okay. Anything else?
             Thanks very much, everybody. Have a wonderful
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25
   holiday. Thank you, as always, for your help.
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